



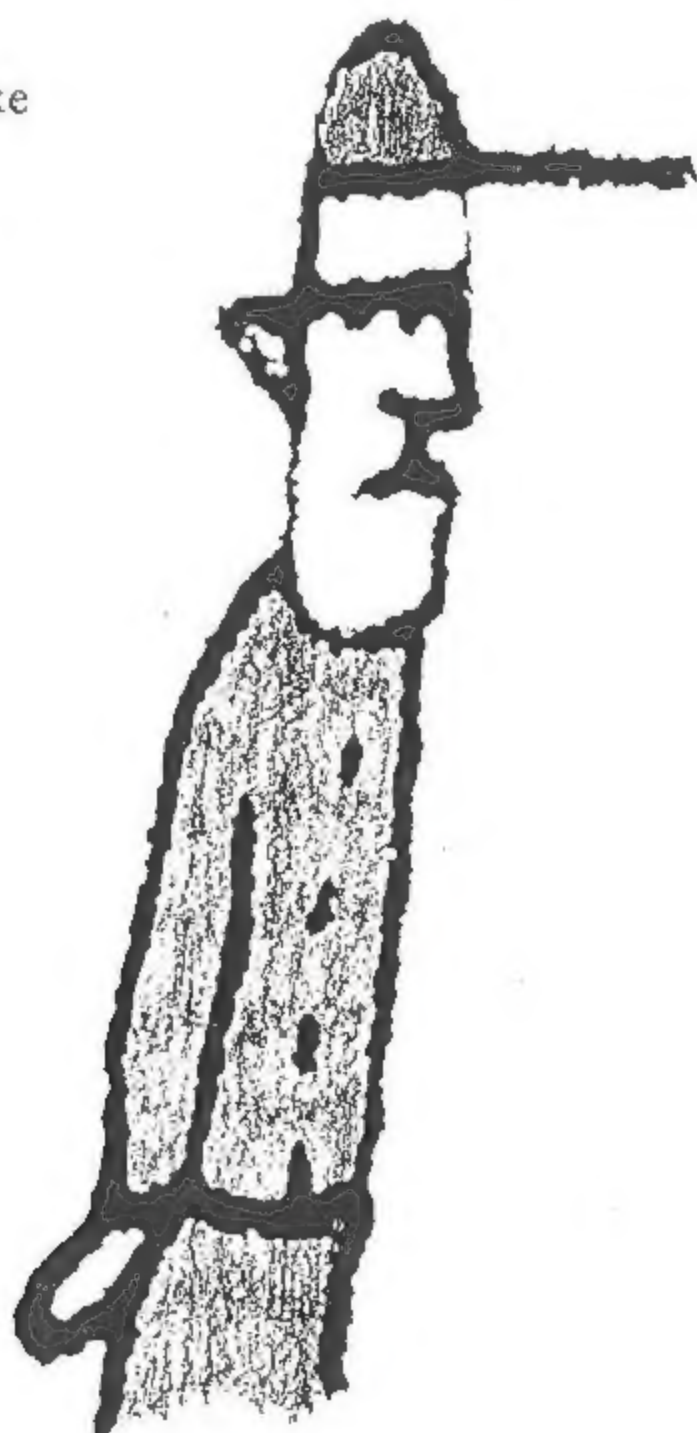
BEZANGO, WA 985

Hidden in the Coastal Mountains of Southwest Washington State is an obscure town far from Interstate 5, far from the sphere of influence of a major metropolitan region. Welcome to Bezango, Washington. Allow me to introduce you to a few of our citizens.



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There is only one commercial building in Bezango with two floors. It is known as the "Brick Bump," and maybe some other time I'll get into the name's origin. Right now I want to focus on Hank, the elevator man in the building. No kidding, we really have a guy who operates the elevator between two stories here in Bezango. That's his sole job. Always has been. If you say to him, "Hey Hank, I guess your job really has its ups and downs," or, "They wanted to make this place 3 floors, but that's another story," here is how he'll react:

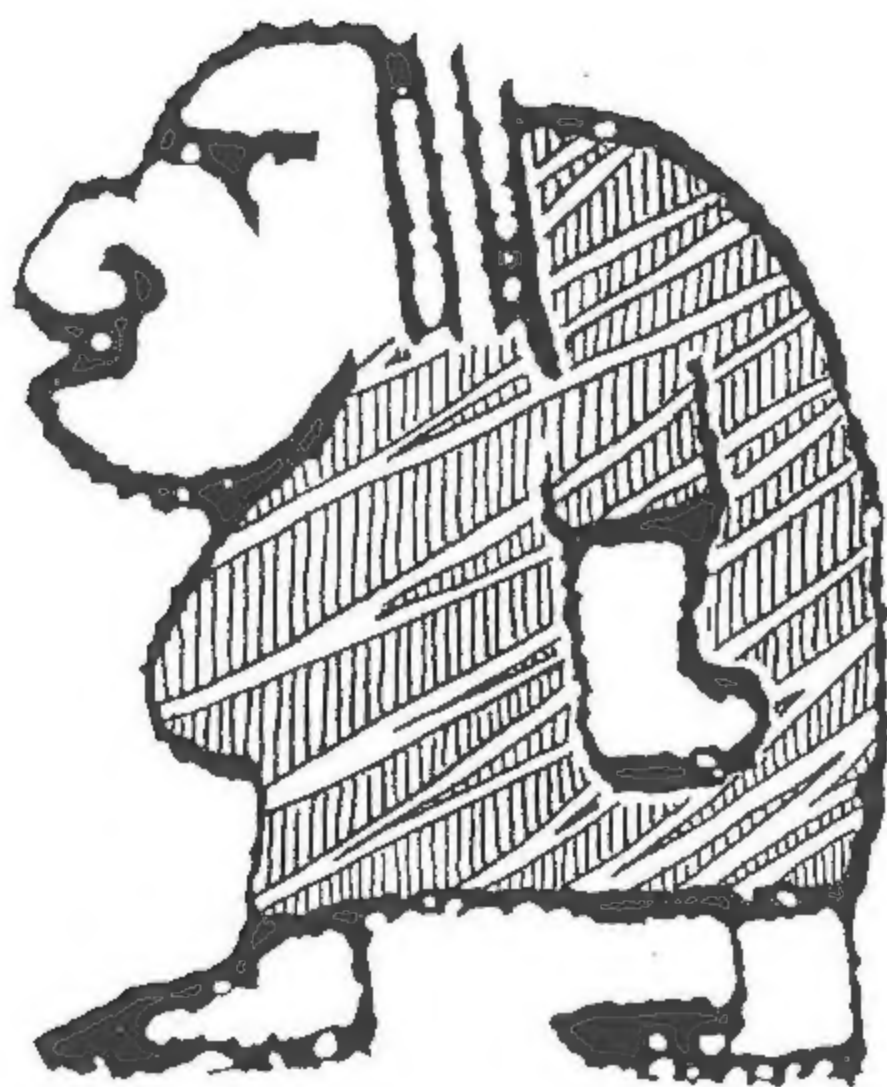


Fred has a conversation with a different fire hydrant every day. He follows something of circuit, and you can set your calendar on it. If he's talking to the hydrant on the corner of Pingo and Uberflumpf St., you know it must be Wednesday, for example. His end of the conversation is usually something like, "Yup, I can see it all now. So crystal clear. All the pieces are starting to fit together. The writing is on the wall for all to see, no question about it ..." This includes lots of heavy sighing and sad shaking of the head, usually in the negative but sometimes affirmative. One time he got into an argument with the hydrant in front of the Bezango Cafe, and refused to talk to it for over a month, which threw the whole town off in terms of keeping track of which day it was. He'll talk to people too, sometimes. Usually about baseball. He is also very good at checkers.



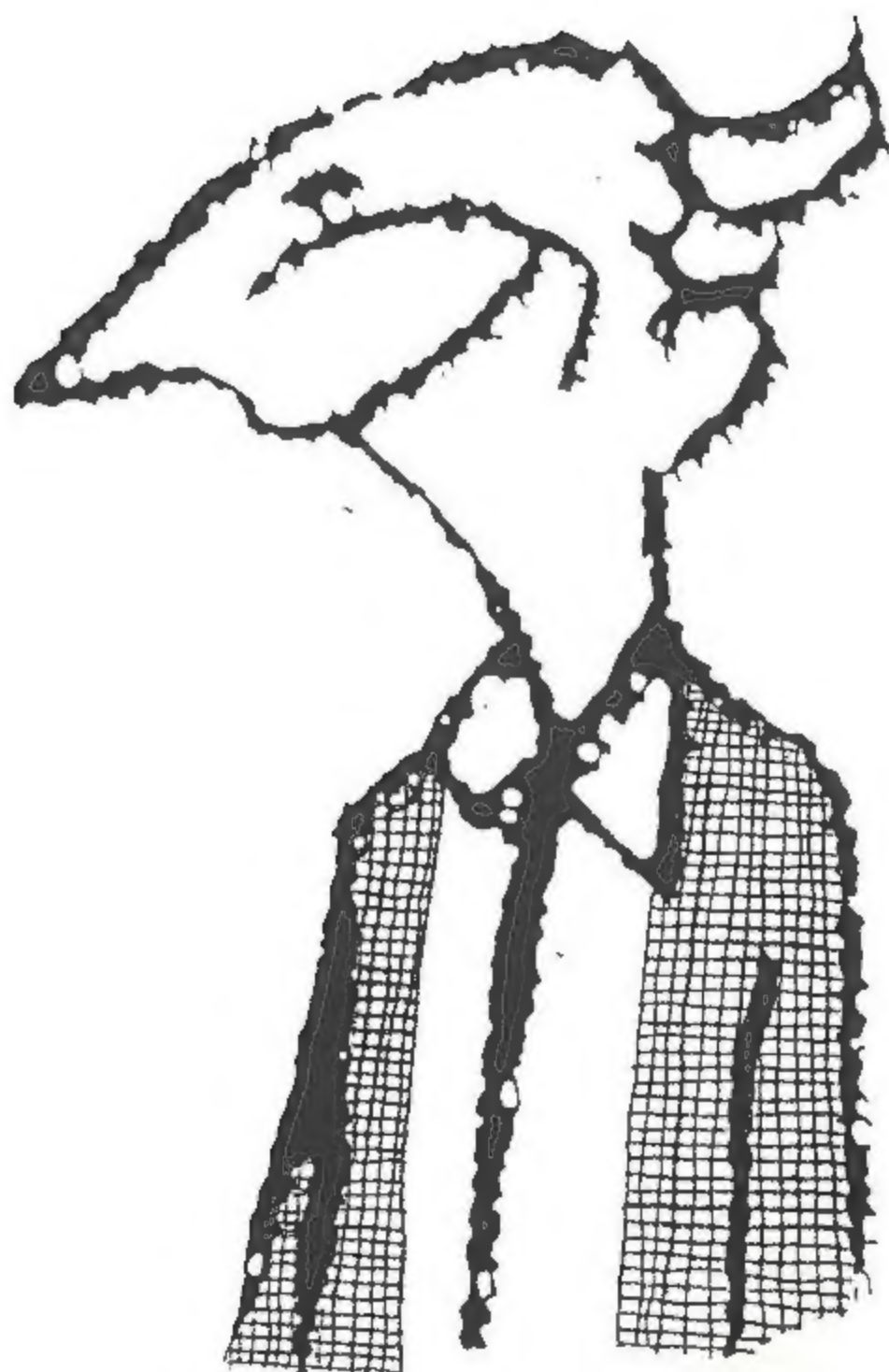
He was a short old coot with a nasal voice. His glasses were made heavy by the thick lenses, so he kept scrunching his nose in order to keep them up, giving his voice a strange, undulating sing song. He was bald on top, but combed over it with his long hair from the cranial rim. Always chipper, unceasingly happy, he seemed as clueless as a joyful bulldozer. He had moved here 30 years ago, which made him a newcomer. His past was a mystery and he volunteered nothing. After he died, we discovered he had been a Communist, driven into the wilderness of Bezango by the witch-hunts of the 1950s.





“Toots” McGee sat at the same desk for 30 years in the stale, back room of the First National Bank of Bezango. One week after she retired, she put on dark clothes, drank an entire bottle of cheap wine, and took a walk on Bezango’s main traffic artery during a moonless night. It was her final foray.

When released prisoners behave like this, experts use the word “institutionalized,” but I think they need to invent a new term for the released wage slave.



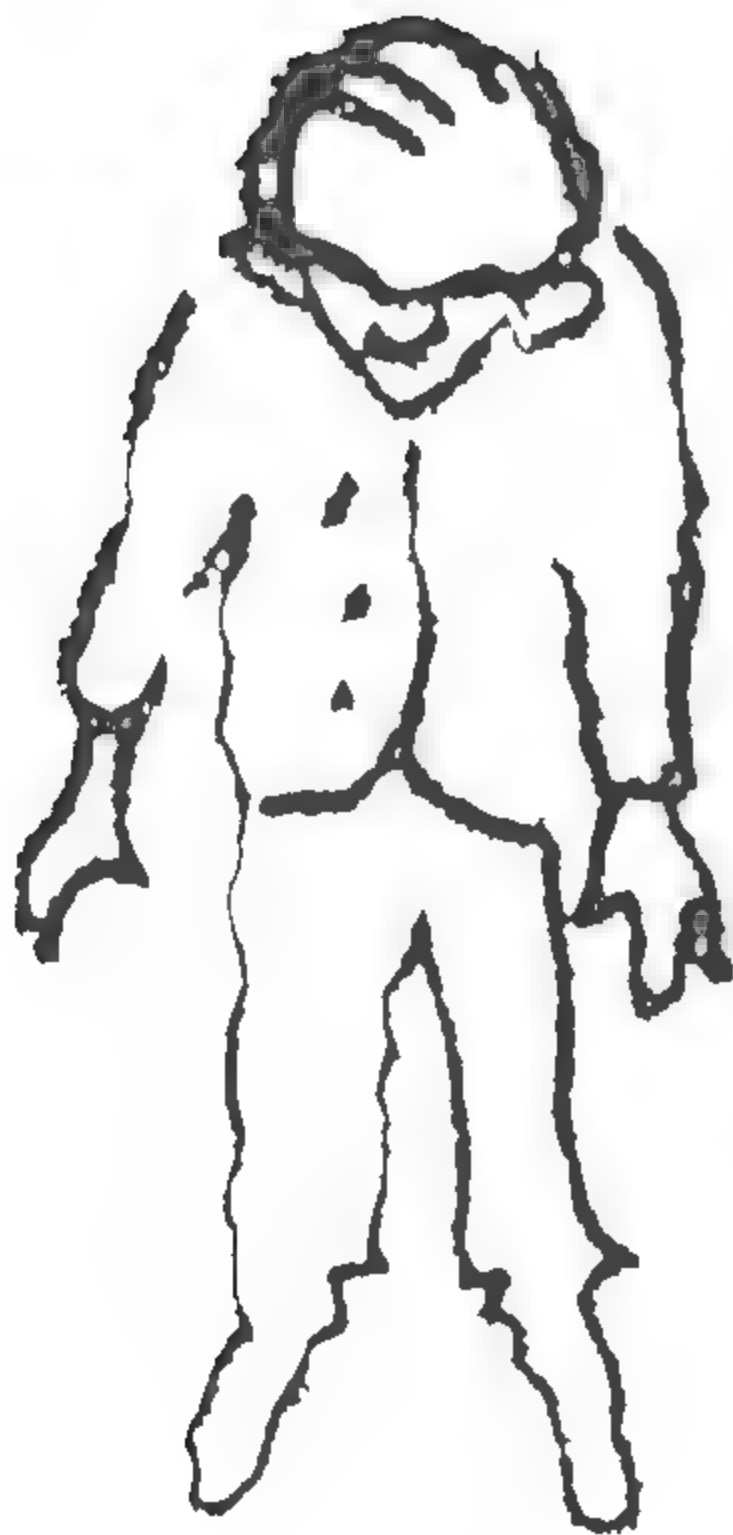
Mr. Duckwart teaches history at Homer T. Bone High School, and the teenagers of Bezango love him. Here is an example why:

The goody-goody students in the front row of his class, the ones with their hands up and textbook-correct answers at the ready are known as "Gunners" by the majority of unwashed average students. One enterprising groundling decided to cash in on the dislike of the 4.0 classmates and created "Gunner Bingo" cards. In place of the numbers, these Bingo cards had photos of the little brown-nosers. Whenever one of the Gunners gave an answer, the player could mark off that spot. And instead of yelling "Bingo," the card holder would indicate a Bingo by volunteering a question in class. The cards cost a dollar per class, and the winner would win a portion of the take.

Then one day one of the Gunners, a girl named Orna, discovered the existence of the Bingo game and complained to Mr. Duckwart. He listened with a cocked head and serious expression, and promised to do something about it. The next morning he stepped up to his podium at the front of class, cleared his throat, and announced with a straight face, "As of today, I declare Orna to be a 'Free space.'"

Herman was a child television star in the early 1960s. TV viewers loved it when the cute little guy squeaked out his bratty catchphrase, "Gimmie dat!" week after week. When he hit 13 it wasn't so cute anymore, and his brief acting career came to an end. Reruns, however, brought a cult following. And the fans tracked him down to Bezango, where he earns a living as a pig farmer. Initially he was flattered by the attention, but that glow was short-lived. He grew to hate the ever-requested "Gimmie dat!" and as a defense tried his best to become invisible. He is now, without question, the most boring, colorless, drab character not only in Bezango, but in the entire county. So much so, that people have to squint hard just to see him. My neighbor claims she was able to pass her hand through him, as if he was made of vapor. Come to think of it, it has been a long time since anyone has seen him shop for groceries.





In 1982 something strange happened to Harry Thiessen. During that year, on April 2nd, as he was waiting to cross the street at the corner of Pleasant Bog Ave and Pingo St, his body slowly lifted about two feet into the air and he just hung there, unable to move in any direction. He is still there today. He was quite an attraction at first, but after awhile the people of Bezango got used to him floating limply in mid-air. Now he has become just another local landmark, like the giant neon "EAT" sign on the Bezango Cafe (with part of the "E" burned out so it reads "FAT") or Mr Gorch's 1963 Studebaker Lark up on blocks in his front yard since 1974. You know, odd at first but now a local landmark we are all used to. That's Harry. People used to fuss over him all the time every day. But during the last few years he has gone a day or two before someone remembers to feed him.

We simply know her as the Girl With The Black Box
If she has a real name, it has long since been forgotten
She carries around this box, which, yes, is black
In it, she claims, is the most fabulous item in the world,
although she herself has never seen it A few people
have seen what is inside, but none of them lived for
more than a few hours after viewing They all died with
big smiles In spite of this, some people will take the
risk and ask the Girl With The Black Box to open the lid
She will open it a bit, careful not to look in herself, and
watch the recipient with detached interest





Nothing pleases Margaret more than to get into a situation where she can cry, "Oh, I'll be alright. Take care of the others." And it sure seems to happen a lot. We plan to carve that quote into her headstone. Some of us in Bezango have kind of a twisted sense of humor.

Howie, the Man With the Tail, is Hank the Elevator Man's brother. Other than the fact Howie is The Man With the Tail, there is little else to say about him except he likes to watch TV a lot.



